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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that teacher knowledge is a necessary component in the development of new knowledge about teaching and learning. Teacher knowledge in collaboration with university partnerships that are engaged in the practice of intentional change coupled with reflective conversations that serve as an enhancement to ongoing, long-term professional development is a powerful tool for understanding the nature of teaching and learning. The paper describes changes that occurred over time in the reflective conversations of one such collaborative partnership. Four teachers and a teacher educator worked over one year in active, intentional, and ongoing professional development. One significant element of their collaboration was engaging in reflective conversations. These conversations led to the growth of an interdependent learning community in which all participants came to understand their connection to every other member of the group. The paper describes the project, which was set in middle schools within a large urban school district to promote faculty development. It discusses the reflective conversations, examining barriers to change, conditions for change, and changing practice. Finally, it notes implications arising from this work, discussing action made public; action as a focus of change; focused, rule-governed reflection; connections; and going public. (Contains 39 references.) (SM)

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Going Public:

Middle-Level Teachers Build a Learning Community Through Reflective Discussions

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Going Public:
Middle-Level Teachers Build a Learning Community Through Reflective Discussions

There is a tradition in teacher education encouraging teachers to engage in teacher action research (Carr & Kemmis, 1986), to engage in reflection-in-action (Schön, 1982, 1990), to participate in reflective conversations (Carini, 1986), and to engage in reflective teacher study groups (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999; Lytle et al., 1994; Passman, 1999, 2001). At the core of this tradition is the epistemological position that recognizes teachers as knowers and, as such, are active contributors to the knowledge base pertaining to teaching and learning. In this view, significant value may be placed on building a collaborative relationship between university partners and classroom teachers leading to an intentional informing of practice through the synthesis of theory and practice.

There are three responsible traditions that view knowledge ownership and the creation of new knowledge differently. One tradition argues that knowledge produced by university researchers engaged in disciplined scientific investigation is the only valid knowledge about teaching. This view privileges

theory over practice. Another tradition argues that teachers engaged in the practice of teaching are the owners of knowledge. This view discounts theoretical contributions to the knowledge base. In the third tradition, theory and practice are not considered as oppositions in isolation, rather they are acknowledged as equal contributors to the creation of new knowledge (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). By making these distinctions, teaching practice may be seen as being theory driven and in opposition to practical knowledge. It may also be understood as being dependent on practical knowledge alone discounting theory as irrelevant, or as a synthesis of theory and practice as developed in dialectical discourse (Carr, 1987). This set of distinctions is made clear by adopting the terminology of "knowledge-for-practice," "knowledge-in-practice," or "knowledge-of-practice" respectively (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

In this paper I argue that teacher knowledge is a necessary, though not sufficient, component in the development of new knowledge about teaching and learning. Teacher knowledge in collaboration with university partnerships that are engaged in the practice of intentional change coupled with reflective conversations that serve as an enhancement to ongoing, long-term professional development is a powerful tool for understanding

the nature of teaching and learning. It is, in the end, the public nature of a collaborative, collegial relationship between teachers and their colleagues that addresses the sufficiency issue.

Teacher knowledge, born of experience and nurtured in the context of the reflective conversation is, in this view, practical knowledge in the sense described by Aristotle (Aristotle, 1985). The force of this argument lies in understanding the underlying compatibility of theory and experience in the Greek sense of these terms; that, in the end, practice is understood as action taken as a result of intentional deliberation within a tradition. Theory as well as experience may inform intentional deliberation, in this sense, with neither being privileged within the discourse. Practice is, then, imbedded within a context of a dynamic tradition that must be examined and re-examined by and through intentional deliberation and reflection (Carr, 1987).

There is a rich tradition of professional development that focuses on engaging teachers in active reflective conversations. Richardson (Richardson, 1994) describes a long-term professional development process in which the notion of the practical argument was the basis for conversation and change. Cochran-Smith & Lytle (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) describe teacher

discussion groups and reflective conversations based on the Prospect Documentary Process (Carini, 1986). Additionally, engaging teachers in one-on-one reflection in a collaborative learning relationship of a teacher mentoring a student teacher allowed both participants in the dyad to experience a reevaluation of teaching (Tatel, 1996).

Partnerships between schools and university researchers require time to grow and develop. Parties on both sides of the collaboration need time to build trust, to remove any notions of expert/novice distinctions, and to be willing to learn from each other as reflective discussions of practice are held (Passman, 1999). There is a tendency for collaboration to not develop beyond the surface, where colleagues hold each other at arms-length for fear of breaking down barriers of isolation and independence that are a strong part of most teacher cultures. The arms-length collaboration has been called "contrived collegiality" (Hargreaves, 1994a, 1994b). Building trust, in this sense, requires participants to begin by trusting the collaborative process rather than relying on personal trust alone (Fullan, 1993).

The synthesis of engaging teachers in a reflective practice that encourages purposeful change, and helps participants to focus a reflective discourse about that change in collaborative

effort with university participation leads to the understanding that professional development may grow out of an ongoing relationship that values teacher input as a contributing factor to the development of new knowledge about teaching and learning. Additionally, when seen through a Vygotskian lens (Vygotsky, 1978, 1986), relationships between partners can be understood in terms of collaboration among and between peers. This view helps to explain the developing nature of learning communities that grow naturally out of collaborative partnerships.

This paper discusses the changes that took place over time in the reflective conversations of one such collaborative partnership. Four participating teachers and I worked together for one academic year engaged in active, intentional and ongoing professional development. One significant element of our collaboration was to engage in reflective conversations that I called Reflective Practice Discussion Groups (Passman, 1999). As those conversations developed, they led to the growth of an interdependent learning community in which each participant came to understand their connection to every other member of the group. This relationship was reflected in the ongoing conversation that changed over time from one that focused on Barriers to Change to one that manifested the connections to teaching and learning and to each other as each member struggled

with the essence of changing practice. In the remaining sections of this paper I will briefly discuss the context of the overall project. I will then discuss the reflective conversations. Finally, I will discuss some broad implications arising from this work and propose further research that might be undertaken.

The Context

This project was set in a large Midwestern urban school district. The district has over 550 elementary and secondary schools, nearly a half a million students and approximately 29,000 teachers. The district gained national notoriety for undertaking reforms to end social promotion, to make standards for achievement clear, and to hold schools and teachers accountable for the achievement of their students. Not without its critics (Byrk, Thum, Easton, & Luppescu, 1998; Roderick, Bryk, Jacob, Easton, & Allensworth, 1999), this "get tough" policy was a measured political response to charges that the district was the worst in the nation. The neo-reform movement was cleverly disguised as a movement to recover central political authority over schools, a control that was lost to an earlier wave of reform that, starting in 1986, began to decentralize the district and grant significant fiscal and

curricular control to local schools through elected local school councils.

The reflective conversation project described here was a part of a modest professional development effort in twelve of the district's middle-level schools designed to focus on student-centered teaching and learning as one way to improve student achievement in schools. The project was conceived during the decentralizing reform period and was implemented as the "get tough" policy was first being articulated. The overall project was designed to work with select teams of six teachers each within each school. Two professional development consultants chosen from four participating disciplines (the arts, mathematics, social studies, and writing) worked with the teacher teams to develop student-centered pedagogy in the classroom. The general model for professional development focused on developing teacher leaders within schools that would, in turn, be prepared to mentor other teachers within their own or other buildings as others chose to engage in student-centered teaching and learning.

In my role as a professional development consultant during the first year of the project, I noticed that change was elusive. Teachers were willing to try student-centered practices as long as a consultant was there to support the

effort and there were no other significant pressures placed on them. Mimi[1], a social studies/language arts teacher at East School, was willing, for example, to engage her students in inquiry projects so long as I was present. Her students responded in ways that prompted her to remark, "Students get really smart when you teach 'em that way." Mimi, however, reverted to direct instruction techniques immediately after her principal announced to his teachers, "Don't teach anything unless it is on the Iowa test." Mimi responded by separating her students from small working groups in which inquiry was the order of the day and placing them in rows and aisles. She told me, "All that student-centered stuff was fine, but now it's time for some real work (Passman, 2001)."

Mimi's story was not uncommon. Pressures to perform in the district ran high and, without the support of a developing learning community it was difficult to maintain a sense of continuity within our project. I was interested in knowing if there was a way to help build a learning community that might be resistant to these powerful outside pressures while maintaining a strong student-centered, inquiry focus in the classroom. Based on two fairly arbitrary criteria, first that the participants showed signs of growth during the first year of the project and second that they had a supportive administrator, I

asked four teachers to participate in a reflective practice group as an addition to their normal classroom duties as well as their responsibilities to the larger project. Two teachers, Florence and Perry, taught at North School. Sarah taught at West School and Rose taught at South School.

I continued to work in each participant's classroom, visiting once a week during the course of the school year. Additionally, we met five times during the course of the year in a moderated Reflective Practice Discussion Group (RPDG) session. Data was collected from a number of sources. Transcripts of the RPDG sessions made from audiotapes. Videotapes were also made of each RPDG session. Each participant was interviewed three times in a series of active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) and transcripts were made from the audiotapes of the interviews. Additionally, I made formal observations of each teacher in the classroom producing contemporary field notes. Finally, I kept a journal of consulting activities which I called historical field notes. The distinction between contemporary and historical field notes is significant in that the historical field notes were made after the fact and were laced with recall and interpretation while the contemporary field notes were spontaneous interpretations. All data was interpreted using qualitative methods including narrative

analysis (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Riessman, 1995) and semiotic cluster analysis (Feldman, 1995).

Data Sources and Frequency

Data Source	Frequency	Media
Reflective Practice Discussion Group Sessions	5 times	• Audio tapes • Video tapes • Transcripts prepared from audio tapes
Participant Interviews	3 per participant	• Audio tapes • Transcripts prepared from audio tapes
Formal Observations	3 per participant	• Field Notes (Contemporary)
Retrospective Field Notes	Ongoing	• Field Notes (Historical)
Participant Journal	Ongoing	• Jour

The Conversations

Language is, at its best, a difficult medium for communication. Meanings are often muffled and vague. Intentions are difficult to assess. As I listened to the conversations of each RPDG session, I was, in effect, reliving each conversation. I re-constructed and re-presented events and

meanings with the benefit of both hindsight and a growing understanding through recursive engagement with the text of the RPDG conversations. The account I am re-presenting in this paper is my understanding of the development of the conversations over the period of one academic year.

The RPDG is based, in part, on the neo-idealist notion of the ideal speech situation described by Habermas (1979). The underlying idea is that in order to develop a form of communicative action, speech that is geared toward mutual cooperation, that there must be a forum for speech that is purposefully removed from the domain of strategic, or self-serving, speech. The ideal speech situation occurs when participants agree to leave their attitudes and beliefs at the door, agreeing to examine claims made by participants in an agreed upon atmosphere of mutual cooperation and accord. While critics have argued that the ideal speech situation is a contextually impossible ideal (Benhabib, 1986) and Habermas himself regrets using the term according to Cooke (1991) because of its imprecise nature, the approximation of the ideal speech situation serves as an informative metaphor for the RPDG.

Each RPDG session is divided into five segments based on the Prospect School Documentary process (Carini, 1986) as expanded upon and elaborated by Cochran-Smith, Lytle, and their

colleagues (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, 1999; Lytle, Belzer, & Reumann, 1993; Lytle et al., 1994; Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992; Lytle & Fecho, 1991, February). In the first segment, all participants watched a videotape of one of the participants teaching a lesson in his or her own classroom. I chose to be first in order, to set the tone through early personal exposure and risk. The remaining participants volunteered to videotape themselves teach and bring that tape to a subsequent session. We watched the tape in silence, observing and taking descriptive notes based on what we saw and heard. In the second segment, participants, other than the one bringing the tape, described what they saw while the participant bringing the tape listened and took notes. A moderator reminded participants to not engage in judgmental conversation. The moderator also took notes on chart paper that was hung around the room. In the third segment, the participants as described above asked questions and speculated about what they saw. In the fourth segment, the participant bringing the tape was asked to respond while the others listened and took notes. The response was prompted by this comment from the moderator, "Please respond by answering questions raised and commenting on what you found to be unexpected or what surprised you in the conversation up to now." Finally, all participants engaged in a discussion responding to

the moderator's question, "What does all of this conversation have to do with our teaching practice?"

For the purposes of this paper, I am concerned only with the conversation in segment five. It is in this phase of the discussion that restraints, except for judgment, are lifted from the participants and all are at liberty to participate. The conversation is a rich and extraordinary source of developing teacher knowledge contributing to the nature of practice.

In analyzing these conversations, three distinct themes emerged. The themes ran recursively through each of the five RPDG sessions. They were, however, found to be more prominent in specific sessions, reasonably inferring a growing development of teacher knowledge over time. The themes are elaborated as: 1) Barriers to Change, 2) Conditions for Change, and 3) Changing Practice. In the Barriers to Change theme participants responded to outside pressure, expressing uncertainty, and commenting on external conflicts with their teaching. When engaged in conversation that was classified as Conditions for Change participants responded by asking questions of their practice and telling stories from their own experience while searching for a common language appropriate for articulating change. Finally, when speaking in the Changing Practice mode, participants noticed structure in practice, dealing with

insights from their own practice, engaging in internal struggles with the meaning of teaching, and expressing tentative understandings of practice. In the last segment, the distinguishing feature was that the participants developed a language that demonstrated an internalization of their own changed practice.

Barriers to Change

Barriers to Change is a theme informed by three connotative meanings or metaphors that were identified as pressure, uncertainty, and external conflicts. Before I go on it is important to say a word about the themes and the metaphors that comprise the themes themselves. While they are listed as discrete units, they are anything but discrete. There is a significant overlap of meaning within and among the codes which, it seems to me, conforms with the lived-experience which is a murky weaving together of threads of remembered experience (Riessman, 1995). While I am discussing the themes and metaphors as discrete entities for the purpose of analysis, we all need reminders that they are not anything of the sort. They are, in fact, threads of remembrances woven together into an interpretative narrative tapestry of understanding.

Pressure: Teachers felt pressure. Oh, did they feel

pressure! In the beginning of the RPDG sessions pressure was reflected in terms of teacher perceptions of accountability to outside forces over which they had no control. The awesome task of teaching children while maintaining a connection to curriculum, standards, outcomes, and assessment, while, simultaneously, being subject to external threats about accountability for student performance felt to participants like an imposing burden on practice.

During an early session Sarah questioned her practice, "Well, I guess what I hear you say is the kids need to come to understanding and if you do Mesopotamia and Egypt and China and this and this, they would have exposure but understanding will never come.[2]" In this brief snippet of conversation, Sarah attributes the dilemma to a conflict between genuine knowledge and coverage, between learning and scoring well on a test (Allington & Walmsley, 1995). She continues, "I sometimes question myself, I // are you just kidding yourself, saying you're going for understanding 'cause you just can't move on fast enough, and some of that is my fault that we can't move on fast enough." Sarah argues with herself about the need to cover material, to be accountable to the curriculum and the more noble desire to help her students reach a deep understanding of history. It is, I claim, the fact that Sarah was engaged in

intentional reflection that allowed her to even approach this subject openly.

In another conversation between Florence, Perry, and Sarah the issue of pressure gains further stock.

> Florence: My ques // I totally agree with you, totally agree with you. My question concern is all of a sudden it's May.
>
> Perry: You're talking about testing.
>
> Florence: Then all of a sudden there comes out this Iowa Test and the social studies has a question about Latin America and a question about India, and a question about China and, y'know, all this different stuff and they may have great research skills by the time they're done and they might know how to
>
> Sarah: But they never heard of India!

Uncertainty: Participants also created Barriers to Change as they engaged in the struggle of implementing change. In this case the external force came from the interactions with CSATC consultants, especially myself, as we worked together to implement a model of changing practice in the classroom. Uncertainty, in this sense, represents a transitional barrier, one that focuses on what it means to change. It is, perhaps, a

stage in the struggle to create an internal language for the act of change itself.

In an early RPDG discussion Florence was focusing on how her classroom is disrupted by a math teacher who comes in and rearranges the room from groups to rows. She was visibly angry, frustrated, yet resigned to this disruption. "Just the way it is we accept it and we had to learn to deal with it and we do it." Her resignation with the fact that she had to accommodate the math teacher is expressed here as a pedagogical struggle. There is a sense that she is on the right track, but then here comes this math teacher upsetting the apple cart. There is also a sense in her sense of resignation that she is not yet certain that she has it right.

Uncertainty was sometimes expressed as a conflict between constructivist, student-centered practice and a more traditional practice.

> Perry: one thing I can say, and I'm sure you're all aware of it, it takes a long time, I mean it would be a lot easier for me to *blah, blah, blah, blah*, and you guys answering, but by doing this thing, and probably you're right, that the more you do it the better you get at it, um, it does work, you can see that the

> wheels slowly turning but its well worth the effort, they get, they achieve things better I think than before and I don't want to ever have to go to, y'know, here's 10 questions out of the textbook, answer them. I still have to do that by the way, but I do it for the parents benefit. I can't stand that kind of stuff so I don't mind taking the time, I'm thinking already again this is what Roger's talking about, um, I may not cover India and China and so what y'know.

External Conflicts: The final metaphor for Barriers to Change is external conflicts. Participants tended to focus on language that sought out a level of compromise with the external pressures they felt. They also explored quick-fix solutions that might bring instant understanding for their students and spent time in conflict with constructivist teaching theory and methods in general.

Sarah, for example, offered the following advice sandwiched between Florence's conflict with what it meant to be student-centered.

> Florence: Well I think for me its been, y'know, one way or the other is easy. I don't know if

its easier, its like, its like, it seems like its more

Sarah: philosophically in line. Make it all teacher directed or all student directed

Florence: right it seems like everything should fall into these categories and I know that's not true, and what we're doing is we are trying to find this balance here, and what really works, and those are a lot of the questions I have

Participants were caught in a constructivist eddy. While they were being pulled away from their traditional base they did not have a full understanding of, the ability to visualize, what the replacement might look like. Sarah's idea to make it all or nothing and Florence's concluding with a lot of questions surfacing on the landscape of change provided an insight into the discourse of conflicts. The conflicts were still, however, externally based. The connection continued to be one made to external issues: how do I handle a set of circumstances that are thrown at me from some place else.

Sarah ventured into the arena of the quick fix as a solution to her problems of conflict.

Sarah: I guess maybe one of the things to get

> around this is cause I know I have the same kind of thing, oh boy, I always meant to get there but we never did, um, is, may, get some kind of computer program if a kid is interested in exposure they have a world history and they have some of those either CD-ROM or and put 'em on and just during their free time go an play through this and run through this and then they will get exposure to this.

In response to a discussion on assessment, coverage, and coverage pressures felt by the participants, Sarah focused on the idea that maybe we can insure coverage, or at the very least, exposure to ideas if only we gave students CD-ROM programs to work with. Sarah focused on this solution as a way to bring student-centered activity to the classroom while, at the same time, remaining true to the demands of the system. Sarah's quick fix is a response to the overwhelming pressure she felt to cover material in order for her students to test well.

Conditions for Change

Conditions for Change is a cluster that represents reflective teacher talk mainly drawn from classroom experiences

as narrative and a placing into question classroom practice. Unlike the earlier category of Barriers to Change, Conditions for Change is informed by the experiences and questions of the participants rather than being driven by the agendas of others. Conditions is internally driven where barriers were driven by external factors that appeared to be outside the control of the participants everyday experience. There are three metaphors that constitute the connotative meanings representing Conditions for Change: 1) confidence, 2) stories from experience, and 3) questioning of practice.

Confidence: As their talk began to take on a sense of purpose, participants became more confident in their utterances. It was almost as if there was a sudden release from the yoke of the external forces of Barriers to Change as talk began to take on the issues of real classrooms. Confidence is being used here in a narrow sense. It does not represent bravado or an air of conviction. It is rather more like a conscious recognition of membership in a learning community something akin to Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development, the ZPD. The confidence represented here is more like a sense of a developing dependency on community. In this sense, confidence represents a significant step forward in the positive effort to move toward a student-centered practice. Perry, for example, expresses

confidence when he says:

> Perry: What I like about this has, um, the questions that we use in, y'know, our living so they don't have to deal with those clever devices that we use, I mean, who, what, where, those are hard questions, but they're the questions that we use, I mean its not made up of stuff.

Contextually, Perry is talking about the application of a strategy in the classroom that encourages students to ask productive historical questions constructed from viewing a photograph (Passman, 2000). What distinguishes this talk from the earlier Barriers to Change talk is the internalization of the strategy rather as a potentially useful classroom practice rather than merely responding to the strategy as an externally imposed obligation. Perry, in a tentative manner, is focused on how the strategy applies to himself and to his students. He is internalizing rather than reacting. There is, additionally, an early hint at the notion of professionals learning from professionals in the comment that, "its not made up of stuff."

Rose echoes Perry's thoughts when she added, "You let the kids do this and that they took over the whole thing and that as the process went on that the kids actually got better." Rose is

recognizing the internal motivation that comes when students and teachers are acting together for common goals. Like Perry, she is internalizing a strategic practice and making it her own.

The discourse of confidence represents a developing recognition among participants that externally imposed conditions need not stand as a barrier to their adoption of a student-centered practice. This discourse represents a developing recognition among the participants that change develops as they internalize the process and begin to see positive changes in their students.

Stories from experience: As the participants began to share stories of their classroom experiences they made a start at understanding and internalizing the process of change. The stories told stand in stark contrast to the talk during the earlier Barriers to Change phase. Much like the metaphor of confidence, stories provided a forum to separate the uncontrollable from the controllable. In abandoning the things outside the participant's direct control they took on the role of mentoring each other by playing off of their own shared experience. Two important narratives were revealed in the stories teachers told. The first surrounded stories of surprise, especially at the performance of their students. The second revolved around experiences of changing practice.

Surprise stories proved to be interesting especially as they provided insight into teacher expectations of students. The language of surprise suggests that teachers have a lowered expectation of the potential of student performance. In short, surprise reflects lowered expectations by teachers of their students. Lakoff (1987) suggests that surprise arises from a significant mismatch between stereotypical categories and actual encounters with the world. Collins (1995) argues that school literacy is a hegemonic construction that blurs the lines of multiple literacy's creating a stereotypical category that, in Lakoff's terms leads to the potential of significant mismatches in expectations. Heath (1983) points to the differences between local contexts and school contexts that often do not match. It is not a huge leap to assume that the failure of school literacy's to match home literacy's coupled with the hegemonic notion proffered by the vocal standards movement that one size fits all that teachers would have lowered expectations of their students, especially if they teach in contexts where the clash between the hegemonic categorizations and home literacy's is strong.

Perry offered an insight into the notion of surprise.

> Perry: It so, y'know, one of those nice things about this thing is that we're giving the

> children freedom to try different things and they're showing, y'know, I'm always surprised by the things the kids do, put on a play, y'know. If I teach the kids how to put on a play I'm gratified. If they do it on their own and I've never done it, I'm flabbergasted I don't know how they ever-how they can do that. I didn't teach them, y'know. It's a wonderful thing they've got it inside, y'know.

"I'm always surprised by the things the kids do," he says. Perry is underestimating what his students are capable of doing. In Perry's case, surprise, while closely connected to expectations, may indicate a willingness to examine his own bias that leads to the surprise.

Florence, too, expresses surprise that her students responded well to a grouping technique she tried for the first time:

> Florence: I just recently for the first time did a numbering thing cause I usually let the kids go where they want to go of I, if I've moved them for whatever reason, where you're sitting, but I did a 1-2-3-4. I've never really done that before and it worked. I was amazed. It

> was like 'I'm a 1, I'm a 2." I put all the 1's over here and the 2's over there. They got together. I had absolutely no problem with somebody saying I don't want to work with so-and-so. I mean I was blown away.

Florence, like Perry, had lowered expectations of her student's performance. Because she had always supported self-selected groups, she was unprepared for the possibility that students might actually appreciate having the group selection pressure removed from their shoulders. Like Perry, she too is willing to explore this new possibility further. Unlike Perry, however, she uses a different indicator for surprise. Her specific language is, "I was amazed." This choice of language may indicate something other than lowered expectations in some cases. Amazement may, under certain circumstances, indicate high expectations and, yet, the outcome retains elements of the unexpected. For example, when I watch a magician perform tricks and illusions I expect to be fooled but I am left with a sense of wonder when I am not disappointed. In Florence's case, her use of "amaze" still indicates lowered expectations, however, her willingness to share the incident as well as her choice of language may indicate a movement toward a rising set of expectations for her students.

Telling stories of experience was another way that the participants established the Conditions for Change discourse. The stories provided a forum for participants to engage in long stories about what they did, what happened, what the reaction was from students, and how the action contributed to changing practice. It was also a way to check in with their colleagues, a way to share, support and confirm change. The narratives tended to be long and rambling. They also tended to paint the narrative in the best possible light in order to make the narrator look good. There was also an ambiguity about the interpretation of the narrative discourse in the sense that they were peppered with multiple themes and representations. In the end, however, I believe they stand as an important force in helping the participants integrate and internalize their roles as teachers in a constructivist classroom. Because these were stories of achievement, they also helped participants develop a constructivist vocabulary. The narratives often emerged as part of on-going conversations.

> Rose: And for the slow kids, y'know, I was telling Roger that I have a kid, um, I'm trying to staff[3] him now. I think he's dyslexic and he misspells his name, and when you, he's in sixth-grade. He's been there since

kindergarten, and when corr, when you write it correctly he'll say, "Oh, that's how to spell my name." But then he'll go back to that. But today, I did it this afternoon, whit, and I thought they not gonna do this, my group, this kid was remarkable. He watched and looked at this picture and when he spoke the kids looked at him like oh yeah right /

Perry: /yeah I've had that experience /

Rose: /Yeah, y'know, that because the kids, y'know, because this kid's really dumb, y'know, and as soon as this kid, y'know, and I said, y'know, well y'know, ah, he's seeing things different from what you're seeing and, well, most kids say, well the sunshine for the, the, ah, time and he said it was in the evening and they looked at him like you're an idiot and I said that's the way he is seeing and they say well okay maybe and then this kid started really coming out. I was shocked cause this kid is really a non-reader and /

Perry: / but its, its like they have that other kind of intelligence, y'know, and they don't

get a chance to show it if you don't put much /

Rose: / and the kids respected him more in what he did. They go, William, wow! And they was really in this kid's corner. Usually they make fun of this kid, can't, but he was like the big kid in the room today and I said, "Wow!" And he was just so excited. Then he said, "Can I go help?" Well they started reading what they did, he said, "Can I go help her read her passage?" Cause he doesn't read, y'know, and he wanted to go help another kid read their passage, what they had written out and I said, "yes, you can go over there." I was like, "Oh!" and he stood there with this kid helping this child read. I was totally shocked cause he doesn't read but he just wanted to. It shocked me.

Rose is telling a narrative of practice, of implementing a technique. She appears to be struggling for the constructivist language to relate her story to the group. Perry is both affirming and supporting the narrative as it is being told. In this sharing of her own struggles with constructivist, student-centered teaching and learning, Rose is taking a risk, putting

out there a tentative success as she struggles to construct meaning from her actions.

The narratives told of classroom experience form a critical link in the category of Conditions for Change. They appear pivotal in moving the participants from the notion that nothing can be done because of all the things that are pushing in on them from the outside. More importantly, however, is that the narratives appear to act as the means for participants to begin to alter their expectations of student performance. In Rose's case, her shock at her student's performance was a turning point in her affective behavior toward her students. I wrote a note a few weeks after Rose shared the story above after spending a morning in her classroom:

> I am noticing a change in Rose's attitude toward her students. She appears less anxious, less tense. I don't quite know how to put my finger on it, but it almost seems as if she believes her students can perform where prior to this she was convinced that perhaps they couldn't. Perhaps there was less of an air of discipline in the room. No one was sitting in one of her isolation chairs. She didn't raise her voice, not even once. In fact, she appeared to me to be more encouraging during the morning than I had ever

seen her. Students also appeared to be more into what they were doing. This change deserves some attention.

In addition to acting as the pivot for impacting affective behavior, the sharing of narratives of practice also appeared to be critical in opening the door to the last phase of Conditions for Change; the narratives were closely related to the last metaphor for Conditions for Change, the act of asking questions.

Questioning of Practice: During the period represented by Conditions for Change participants began to ask serious questions about their practice. Beyond the telling of narratives, questioning represented a response to actions taken in the classroom designed to implement a change in practice. The questions raised by participants led to their thinking about practice in different ways, setting the table for internalizing a changed practice. The questions were queries rather than insights, the seeds of understanding rather than understanding itself but they were important and fertile seeds indeed.

Florence, for example, was responding to a discussion on planning when she placed this question on the table for the group:

> Florence: I guess its just being responsible in their own learning process or direct, or directing themselves, or taking charge but

> they're not directing the classroom, they're not directing the curriculum, they're participating in it, um, and maybe, y'know, if we bring students into the meeting where we plan, which we really haven't done, if they're not sitting in our planning meetings I don't think weren't involved in planning that lesson. Its not like Roger's working with students in planning the lesson, so we like we've talked about do we want students to sit down at our tables when we plan curriculum, um, do we want students to be there when we assess, do we want students to be there, y'know?

At one point Florence understood student-centered teaching as student directed. This did not seem to fit well with her understanding of the classroom and so she asks if students needed to be present to plan or assess teacher-generated work. Florence is asking where does the line of responsible behavior need to be drawn. Her question mirrors Fenstermacher's (1986) important distinction between the causal connection of teaching and learning. In Fenstermacher's view teachers are responsible for creating a strong, inviting context for learning to take place. Learning only occurs, however, if students actually

student. Florence's question moves the group closer to an understanding of the reciprocal nature of the relationship between teachers and their students.

Changing Practice

Changing Practice represents a synthesis in which creative solutions or understandings emerge to act as a means to internalize student-centered practice. Changing Practice has two distinct phases, both of which are represented by creative and insightful speech. In the early phase the speech are marked by insights into practice and recognition of structure in practice. The later phase is marked by speech representing internal struggles and an understanding of practice.

Early Phase Talk: The first phase of Changing Practice is represented by insightful speech, the most salient feature of which is its near epiphany like quality. This talk represents a sudden intuitive grasp of a new idea. It is often simple and striking in its characteristics. The early phase is related to Barriers to Change. The sense is one of lifting the veil and exploring the secret of what lies between being an insider and being left outside. The significant difference between early phase talk and later phase talk is that the early phase is not internalized speech. Early phase talk represents the beginning

of synthesis, almost a recognition that the very existence of barriers may be an artificial construction.

Two examples of early phase talk follow:

> Florence: y'know something, I guess I'm still wondering, we talked about it and we talked this summer, y'know, why this is called student-centered learning because I think I'm realizing that so much of it is teacher directed…I think in the beginning when we started I was trying to get it more student directed, but I don't see that happening, I see it more student-participant.

It is too bad that Florence's voice cannot be heard from this snippet of transcription. There was a sense of wonder in her tone, a sense of "Oh, yeah, I get it now!" Florence's initial confusion was giving way to an understanding of her role in the process of student-centered teaching and learning. Her insight was right on target.

> Sarah: Is what really makes it go well for you as a teacher, but you're hoping that it makes it for the kids, that there's an excitement in what you're doing in your curriculum [and it] isn't something you've made up and that you

just didn't have anything else to do.

Sarah is focused on the idea that engaged students discovering for themselves what is there for them in the curriculum will not be betrayed by the facts they encounter. Just beneath the surface of Sarah's words is a discourse of cultural inclusion. Sarah was struggling for ways to reach her culturally diverse students without being condescending or patronizing.

Early phase talk was not long-lived in our discussions. By the third session these flashes of insight had all but vanished from view. They seemed to function as temporary placeholders playing off of Barriers to Change while engaged in the purposeful process of talking about Changing Practice. In retrospect, without these insights into practice there would be no crashing through the barriers at all.

Later Phase Talk: In the end participants engaged in language that internalized a Changing Practice. In effect they were now speaking the language of change. This talk represented ownership of their newly acquired Changing Practice. Personal struggles, not external barriers, led the way in this discourse. This was no longer a group of teachers struggling to find the language to match their ideas; it was, rather, a group of professionals engaged in collegial discussion. Two important aspects of this talk included language of internal struggles and

language of understanding.

Internal Struggles: The language of internal struggles focused on transition, of dealing with the doubts and difficulties they experienced. This talk is distinguished from the earlier narratives about teaching and the raising of questions not by the content of the talk but by the fact that this talk dealt with internal struggles while the latter dealt with pedagogical issues.

Florence is speaking with Perry and Rose about her role in the classroom in session four:

> Florence: and that, see, that's another thing that's hard for me. I've gotta be honest too and as teachers I thing, y'know, /
>
> Rose: /yeah, we, we, we're not /
>
> Florence: /I have to be honest and I have to and I don't always know if a kid's struggling with something should I say something of will they eventually get to it, um, I don't know how ou say what a teacher's role is?
>
> Perry: Y'know, I know what I read about that and that's, that's what life is. Life is not necessarily clear and there's not necessarily one answer one right answer /

> Florence: / and its each situation is a different, different and with each group I thing I work differently when each group was up there I think my role changed depending on how confident the group was or, I mean, there were some groups where I didn't have to say a word and there were groups that actually there was one time, it was later, when they told me to shut-up. They said we're doing this, they did because I jumped in and started saying something.

Not unusual for Florence, she is struggling with the notion of her role as a teacher in a student-centered room. What is different here, however, is her clear appreciation of her changing role in the classroom. For Florence this conversation is one of fine-tuning an already well-oiled engine.

Implications and Conclusions

One of the original goals of this inquiry was to learn something about purposeful action taken to affect change coupled with focused, rule-governed reflection as these two phenomenological constructions interact in the context of ongoing professional development. In that light I want to make

the following observations.

Action Made Public

Each participant was given an opportunity to demonstrate his or her own purposeful action for the whole RPDG. This demonstration came in the form of the self-produced and selected videotape of the participant teaching. It is useful to an understanding of the continuum of constructivist change to briefly examine this very public, and risk-filled display of action taken by our participants in the classroom.

I was the first participant to bring a tape. I chose to go first in order to help reduce the risk to the other participants. My self-exposure to the group made an impact on the other participants. The lesson I chose to tape was one in which students were asked to use a structured framework in order to ask productive questions about a photograph. When I made the tape I saw my role as that of both consultant to the RPDG participants and as teacher.

Perry supplied the second session tape. His students were working on a time line for Mesopotamia. His students were presenting findings about their own topics of inquiry and fitting them into an historical context on the class time line. In the end, Perry used the time line to introduce his students to a personal time line, drawing comparisons between their

personal life histories and historical time.

Rose, who had fallen in love with graphic organizers, produced the third tape. She presented a lesson in using the Herringbone Strategy to help her students organize narratives contained in newspaper articles. Her students were presenting summaries of work done on their herringbone drawings.

Florence went next, presenting a tape in which she was invisible as a teacher. A group of her students were teaching their peers about simile and metaphor. There was a lively discussion, challenging the "teachers" regarding specific points as well as a clearly absorbed classroom. Florence was nowhere to be seen in the tape. It was, however, clear that she designed the project, developed presentation strategies for her students, and provided assistance and resources. She was, however, totally in the background, allowing her students to present their findings to an authentic audience.

Sarah went last. She presented a lesson where a group of her students were training another group to participate in literature circles. Sarah chose to move into the group and sat down, however, her students really ran the discussion from beginning to end.

In the beginning I chose to model a strategy for the participants. In each successive tape, teachers became less and

less visible, allowing students to learn from experience. The movement demonstrated in the tape choices reflects the change in discourse patterns found in the RPDG group sessions. Much like a Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978) my role in the beginning was that of a more competent peer. By the end, my role had shifted to colleague.

Action as a Focus of Change

There is reason to support Fullan's (1993) notion that people act their way into change. Each of the participants decided to act differently, at least in part, from the way they did in the past. Each of the participants acted without a full understanding of what they were doing or why they were doing it. They acted in good faith that the idea being presented to them was worthy of adoption; that it would lead to positive changes for them and for their students.

In the beginning there were different levels of theoretical understanding of what it meant to be a constructivist teacher. Rose and Perry both held multiple master's degrees in education exposing them to a theoretical knowledge of constructivist teaching and learning. Sarah, on the other hand, had attended various workshops provided by her school, a member of the Illinois Writing Project. Her exposure to constructivist teaching and learning was, therefore, contextualized by her work

experience. Florence had the least exposure to formal constructivist teaching and learning practice.

Each participant agreed to and was willing to make public the results of actions taken in their classrooms in the form of a videotaped performance of their own teaching. Because the tapes were self-selected there was a risk that participants might falsely report their classroom to the other participants. Anders and Richardson (1994) discuss this possibility as teachers in their study also self-selected videotapes for observation and study. They rejected the idea that they were not seeing actions that were not representative of the teachers' actual practice because they were observers in the classroom. I too was an observer, consultant in each participant's classroom and for that reason I too reject the idea that false reporting is an issue. The self-selected tapes mirror the actual classroom practice of each participant. But, even if they didn't and false reporting was true, it would make little difference in this analysis because they represented merely the starting point for subsequent analysis of discourse. The teaching tapes, in short, served only to stimulate further conversation.

Each of the participants made some, though not even, progress as student-centered teachers. The fact that the

progress was not even merely points to the human nature of change. The fact that progress toward change was made provides some evidence to support the idea that action, engaging in purposeful behavior intended to bring about change, is an important part of making affective changes in behavior.

Focused, Rule-Governed Reflection

Action taken by teachers as a result of modeling of effective student-centered practice is not sufficient to have a lasting impact on professional practice. One study found a teacher in the same project as Florence, Sarah, Perry and Rose, but without the benefit of participation in the Reflective Practice Discussion Group, was unable to sustain a student-centered practice in the face of external pressure to teach to the test (Passman, 2001).

The RPDG provided the four teachers participating in this study with a forum to examine their own beliefs and understandings of teaching and learning. The focused, rule-governed reflection placed tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1962), the stuff we know because we know it, into question. The participants examined their own highly personalized sets of beliefs, knowledge situated or contextualized within the individual, and group conceptions, knowledge situated in

cultural or social contexts (Gee & Green, 1998) in an organized forum that provided a safe context for that examination. The RPDG served as a forum where tacit knowledge could be made public, where the myths and misconceptions were exposed and exploded in a context of safety and support.

The RPDG allowed the discourse of Changing Practice to grow/change over time. In the beginning the sharing was all about tacit knowledge. As that knowledge was revisited over time, through the focus of artifacts of practice, asking the same set of questions each time, the participants began to develop a shared discourse for their own Changing Practice. The language reflected a dialectic where the oppositions of Barriers to Change and Conditions for Change led to the synthesis of Changing Practice.

Connections

Taken together, action and focused, rule-governed reflection are a powerful force in facilitating permanent, resilient change in professional practice. The model is an experience-based model for change relying on the ontological notion that teachers are creators of knowledge. Growing from an authentic partnership between teachers and professional developers, participants from both sides create working models of practice that contribute to the overall knowledge of all participants,

what Cochran-Smith and Lytle call "knowledge in practice" (1999). The process of action and reflection validates teacher knowledge as a powerful force in professional practice.

The action/RPDG format for professional development, while providing potent forum for examining and changing the practice of teaching, is a micro-process for change. Rather than understanding change as systemic, the unit of change for this process is small. The unit of change is one-teacher/one-classroom at a time. The process is one that builds on itself as local, grass roots projects tend to do. As teachers participate in the RPDG process they, in turn, become leaders of other RPDG circles. As teachers examine their practice larger systemic change in inevitable.

By taking a micro approach to change, the action/RPDG format recognizes the situated nature of practice. It also acknowledges the rather messy reality of professional teaching practice. Teaching is filled with nuance and surprise, happening on the fly in spite of careful and thoughtful planning. In this sense, the action/RPDG format allows teachers a focused time to take a deep breath. The action/RPDG format understands that teaching is more-or-less circular, a recursive process, a continuum of practice, one understood by the practitioners themselves.

Going Public

In the final analysis it was the act of making public the tacit knowledge that each participant brought to the discussion groups that made all the difference. In placing that knowledge on the table for examination in the safety of the group context participants were able to abandon the barriers that forced a practice of reaction allowing that practice to become resilient to external forces. The formal, rule-governed nature of the Reflective Practice Discussion Group seemed to have the effect of the ideal speech situation (Habermas, 1979) as participants engaged in non-judgmental speech with the agreed upon goal of better understanding their own practice.

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[1] All names of people and places are pseudonyms

[2] Transcripts were transcribed verbatim. Punctuation is added for ease of reading. The convention // is used to represent a pause of five or more seconds in the conversation. A single slash / is used to indicate overlapping talk, a case of one participant intruding on the talk of another or two or more participants talking at the same time.

[3] Staffing is the term used by Chicago teachers when referring a student for evaluation to the Multi-Disciplinary Committee. An alternate term used by many older Chicago teachers is "Blue Slipping" because the referral forms were once printed on blue paper.

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